THE GOSPEL A LAW OF LIBERTY.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

HIGHGATE, MIDDLESEX,

ON

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BY

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IT may, perhaps, be expected that I ſhould notice ſome illiberal reflections caſt upon a Work I lately publiſhed by the Analytical Reviewers. As I deteſt the political and religious (if they have any) principles of the writers in that Review, I ſhould diſgrace myſelf by making any reply to their unjuſt, abſurd, and ridiculous criticiſm. I honeſtly declare I ſhould have bluſhed, had I been ſo unfortunate as to have been applauded by thoſe "ſoi-diſant" philoſophers.

The Goſpel a Law of Liberty.

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SERMON, &c.

Epiſt. James, Chap. i. Verſe 25.

"The perfect Law of Liberty."

WHAT St. James here ſtiles the perfect Law of Liberty, is unqueſtionably the glorious goſpel of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; we ſhall therefore endeavour, in this diſcourſe, to illuſtrate this juſt and truly elegant definition of the goſpel; and in the firſt place, ſhew the nature of it, that it is a law: ſecondly, the excellency of it; the goſpel is a perfect law: and thirdly, the advantages derived from it; it is a law of liberty.

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The firſt thing St. James ſays of the goſpel is, that it is a law; this at firſt appears contradictory to it's general character, as it is generally oppoſed to the law. Thus St. John ſays, The law was given by Moſes, but grace and truth came by Jeſus Chriſt. There is unqueſtionably a moſt eſſential difference between the law of Moſes and the goſpel; but yet it is a law to which ſtrict obedience muſt be paid; it is a book of ſtatutes, to explain to us what we are to perform, and from what we are to abſtain. It is a rule of life to inſtruct and ſhew us the good we ſhould embrace, and the evil we ſhould avoid. The Apoſtle calls it the law of faith, the law of the ſpirit of life, the law which we are under to Chriſt. Our bleſſed Lord not merely came upon earth to reveal ſaving truths for our inſtruction, to make ſatisfactory atonement for our tranſgreſſions; but he alſo came to promulgate precepts and rules for the governing of our lives, and as the directory of our conduct. The reſt of the creation ſilently and ſteadily obey the laws of their Maker; the heavens and the earth hear and obey God's voice; the winds and the ſea obey him;

him; at his command the ſun ſtands ſtill, and the wheels of nature are ſtopped; at his command the rain deſcends, the thunder roars tremendous, and the forked lightnings illuminate the hemiſphere. From the moment when he firſt called creation out of it's original chaos; when he ſpake, and it was done; when he commanded, and it ſtood faſt; when he marſhalled the ſtars, ſpread the canopy of the heavens, made the ſun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night; bid the liquid water flow; and formed the immenſe variety of creatures which are ſpread over the face of the earth; from that moment, have ſun, moon, and ſtars, and all animated nature, ſteadily obeyed the laws of their Creator; and ſo will they continue to do, till that awful moment, when the mighty Angel ſhall ſwear by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time ſhall be no more. But man, originally ſtamped with the impreſs of his Maker, the principal object of his firſt regard, born for authority and dominion, has rebelled againſt him, and from his firſt creation has been a child of diſobedience; he muſt therefore have line upon line, precept upon precept, to keep

keep him within any bounds or limits: for as Xenophon beautifully obſerves, "Cattle will be kept within their hedges, horſes are made tractable by their riders, wild beaſts, the moſt ferocious, pay obedience to their keepers; but men, headſtrong and refractory, will be guided by no rules, nor ſubmit to juſt laws." Yet the ſupreme Governor, from the firſt creation of man, hath ever impoſed juſt and ſalutary laws upon him for the regulation of his will. When in the ſtate of innocency, Adam had three injunctions given him; to till the ground, to cleave to his wife, and not to eat of the tree of knowledge. Cain was commanded to wander about a wretched fugitive, having a mark upon his forehead, as a puniſhment for the murder of his brother Abel. But there was a ſolemn and awful promulgation of God's laws to his choſen people. He was in an eſpecial manner their law-giver through the medium of Moſes. On Sinai's mount, amidſt ſmoke and fire, and the ſound of a trumpet exceeding loud, which made Moſes even exceedingly to fear and quake, was this law given to Iſrael's choſen ſons. But there was alſo a law given to the heathens---

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the law of conſcience, accuſing, or elſe excuſing their actions, which law, ſays St. Paul, was written in their hearts; and can any imagine then, that chriſtians are without law? Do we make void the law through faith in Chriſt? God forbid; yea, we eſtabliſh the law. The goſpel is a law ſtrictly binding, and obligatory upon all who hear the joyful ſound, the glad news of ſalvation to all who have faith in Chriſt, and believe him to be the great Mediator, through whoſe blood they have acceſs unto God. Our bleſſed Saviour made an alteration in the law; when he came, he blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances, which were only typical of himſelf, and abrogated all the ritual and ceremonial part of the law, which was only a ſhadow of good things to come: but the moral part of the law ſtill remained in all it's force and energy. Our Saviour vindicated and enforced it in the firſt ſermon he preached, ſaying, "That he came not to deſtroy the law, but to fulfil it;" ſo that chriſtians, though freed from the laws of Moſes, are bound to pay ſtrict obedience to the laws of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is that King whom God

hath ſet upon his holy hill of Zion. But the goſpel is not only a law, but it is a perfect law. Laws will always reſemble, in ſome degree, the perſons by whom they are made. Tyrants will make cruel laws, raſh men will make dangerous laws, good men will make juſt laws, and wiſe men will make excellent laws. Now the goſpel being the law of Chriſt, in whom all fulneſs dwells, it muſt be perfect and truly excellent; an exact ſummary of virtue and duty, an adequate guide to direct men what courſe to purſue.

It is the misfortune of all human laws, however wiſely formed, that they reach only to certain points, and are fitted only for certain periods of time; and ſuch are their defects, that they may be eaſily eluded and baſely perverted: but where is the bold ſinner that can evade this perfect law? Human laws can reach only to the exteriors of men, and make their conduct outwardly decent and becoming; make clean the outſide of the cup and the platter, while the heart may be full of all wickedneſs. But the law of Chriſt penetrates into the inmoſt receſſes of the ſoul, cleanſes

cleanſes from all filthineſs, both of fleſh and ſpirit, and is a diſcoverer of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Human laws are likewiſe frequently evaded by the artifices of the culprit, but nothing of this kind can poſſibly avail the ſinner who tranſgreſſes againſt this perfect law. The evidence will be compleat and full, for our own conſciences ſhall accuſe us; the proofs pointed and irreſiſtible, for there is nothing ſecret that ſhall not be made manifeſt. Again, the goſpel is a perfect law, if we conſider how extenſively it operates; it includes all ranks and degrees of perſons, and is as impartial as death itſelf; it equally commands the maſter and the ſervant, the magiſtrate and the ſubject; there is no reſpect of perſons; for God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The goſpel does not condemn ſins in one claſs of perſons, and connive at them in another: no, it is a perfect law; it condemns intemperance as ſeverely when committed by the nobleman as when the peaſant is guilty of it; it as ſeverely reprehends atheiſm and profaneneſs in the higher as in the lower ranks of life. It is a law that will ſay, even to

an emperor or king, What doſt thou? Such is it's extent, that it reaches to all individuals of every nation, people, kindred, and tongue, under the canopy of the heavens; whereas all other laws are confined to their various diſtricts and peculiar boundaries, but this perfect law is calculated for Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Meſopotamia, and Judea; it extends from ſea to ſea, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth. It is ſent into all the world, and is to be preached to every creature; it is not calculated merely for this or that character, but for the native of Otaheite, the wild Arab, the American, Indian, and the untutored Hindoo, as well as for the poliſhed and civilized European. Once more; the perfection of this law will appear, if we conſider it comparatively with reference to other laws: it not only excels all human laws, but even the divine law, which was given by Moſes. The preeminence of our Saviour's law to thoſe of Moſes, appears by conſulting the ſermon on the mount, wherein our Saviour points out many glaring defects in that law, which indeed did not reflect upon the Divine law-giver, becauſe it was

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adapted for a ſtiff-necked and rebellious people; but it was to laſt only till the time of refreſhing and redemption was brought to Iſrael. This law will bear the moſt rigid and philoſophic ſcrutiny, and after the moſt ſevere inveſtigation, conſtrain men to ſay of it, as Pilate did of our Saviour himſelf, We find no fault in it.--But I proceed to conſider what St. James adds concerning this law. It is a law of liberty. The words law and liberty ſeem ſtrangely oppoſite to one another; it appears like the union of fire with water; for where no law is, there it is ſuppoſed by ſome that liberty dwells: but however paradoxical it may ſound, there is no liberty but where there are ſound, juſt, and wholeſome laws. Liberty is a very popular word, and a word of late moſt ſhockingly perverted: to blaſpheme God, and ſpeak evil of dignities; to run to every exceſs of mad fury, unbridled and unreſtrained, is to enjoy a ſtate of liberty, according to the ideas of ſome, who poſſeſſing neither virtue, integrity, or property, go about inflaming the minds of men with declamations about liberty; whereas in truth no greater tyrants in nature exiſt than themſelves.

themſelves. A neighbouring nation, once bound with the chains of deſpotiſm, but by the energetic and godlike exertions of a band of noble patriots, had aſtoniſhed Europe by it's wiſe and judicious conduct after emerging from deſpotiſm; till alas! theſe ſpecious and deluſive ideas of liberty transformed this once polite, elegant, and ſcientific nation into a horde of barbarous ſavages, who, after baſely ſacrificing the lives of the firſt founders of the revolution, the virtuous fathers of their country, embrued their hands in the blood of their ſovereign, made his auguſt conſort, once the object of their ſtupid and fulſome idolatry, the horrid victim of their infernal malice, and at laſt openly placed their Maker at defiance, by aboliſhing the obſervation of the ſabbath, ridiculing the doctrines of chriſtianity, and even of natural religion; placing over the burying places of the dead this impious inſcription, "Death is an eternal ſleep." From ſuch a dreadful ſcene of wickedneſs I turn away with horror, and thank my God that we in this country are yet under the government of that perfect law of liberty, which converteth the ſoul, maketh wiſe the ſimple,

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makes us happy here, and prepares us for the manſions of the bleſſed in yonder bright regions above. Of all the laws the world was ever bleſſed with, the code of laws Chriſt Jeſus has given us, is the moſt excellent, and likewiſe is the leaſt burdenſome: it is a law of ſalvation, the yoke is eaſy, the burden is light, none of the commands are grievous. To obey theſe laws is like walking in a path ſtrewed with flowers, ſuch is the pleaſure they afford. Some perſons form, as I have already obſerved, falſe and romantic notions of liberty; they ſet up licentiouſneſs for liberty; make it to conſiſt in doing whatever their depraved hearts excite them to do. To remove the land-mark of the law of nature, and commit thoſe crimes with impunity, of which heathens themſelves would be aſhamed---this the debauchee calls liberty. To ſwindle and defraud others out of their property, and yet to eſcape puniſhment---this the diſhoneſt man calls liberty. To ridicule his God, to mock and ſcoff at chriſtianity, to call good evil and evil good, to diſſeminate the moſt immoral principles, and looſen the firmeſt bands of ſociety---this the infidel, the pretended philoſopher,

philoſopher, calls liberty. To aboliſh and deſtroy every thing that conſtitutes the harmony, order, and beauty of ſociety; to ſap the foundations of our moſt excellent conſtitution; to make ſport of thoſe that are in authority; to introduce a ſtate of equality, when wealth and property ſhall be wreſted from it's lawful owners---this is the much wiſhed for liberty that democratic levellers wiſh to eſtabliſh. But all ſuch uſing of liberty as tends to licentiouſneſs the goſpel rigidly oppoſes; and yet it is a law of liberty notwithſtanding. Is there any ſeverity in the Divine commands? are they not all rational and juſt, and calculated to exalt and refine us? They teach nothing but what a wiſe man would chuſe to do, guided by the ſober dictates of his reaſon, ſetting apart the rewards and puniſhments of heaven and hell. Our chains are chains of gold, and our fetters ornaments; our obligations are privileges, and our duties pleaſures; and when the Son has made us free, we are free indeed. It is a law of liberty, as it frees us from the burden of ſin, and as it ſaves us from it's curſe. Thus when our Saviour appeared, he proclaimed liberty to the captives,

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to thoſe who were heavily bound with the chains of ſin; and thus to all who flee to him for refuge, he is a Saviour and Deliverer. He ſaves, unto the uttermoſt, all that come to him by faith; ſinners then through faith have deliverance; he breaks the bars of iron, and ſpeaks peace to the captive ſoul. Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? That is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatneſs of his ſtrength? I that ſpeak in righteouſneſs, mighty to ſave. Oh, ſinner, burdened with the weight of this guilt, bowed down with the accumulated load of tranſgreſſions, look up unto Jeſus, and behold the mighty Saviour: his laws are not like thoſe of Draco, written in blood; but his law is a law of liberty. Are thy ſins ever ſo enormous, be not caſt down; ſatisfaction has been made; the price of redemption, even the price of Jeſus has been laid down to obtain thy pardon. Oh, ariſe! and Chriſt ſhall give thee life. Bow to his ſceptre, confeſs thy paſt guilt, humbly implore for mercy, knock at the door, it ſhall be opened; for none that truly ſeek the Lord, but ſhall find his mercy in pardoning their paſt ſins, burying in obli-

vion their tranſgreſſions, if they will but return unto him from whom they have revolted. But thou bold tranſgreſſor, though the goſpel is a law of liberty, there is no liberty for thee while thou remaineſt a willing ſlave and vaſſal of ſatan, led captive at his pleaſure. The thunders of Sinai's mount are now rolling over thy head: Oh, infatuated wretch! ſeeſt thou not the blackneſs and darkneſs already ariſe, which ſhall bring on that ſtorm of divine wrath that ſhall ſink thee into the lake that burneth with fire and brimſtone? By the terrors of the Lord, muſt we thus perſuade ſome men; ſince the law of liberty will not attract them, we muſt flaſh conviction on their minds, ſaving them as by fire. But the goſpel is alſo a law of liberty, as it frees us from the obſervance of Moſes's law. We are freed from the obſervance of thoſe rites and ceremonies which God himſelf once commanded, and enjoined upon his antient people the Jews. The law was their ſchool-maſter, teaching them what the end was to be; and in all the outward viſible ſigns, there was an internal ſpiritual grace. No blood of bulls or goats is now required of us, as

Chriſt,

Chriſt, our great high prieſt, hath once offered up his own precious blood for our ſins, and to expiate our tranſgreſſions. No hyſſop branch or ſprinkling prieſt do we require, ſince the blood of Chriſt cleanſeth us from all ſin, and ſpeaks better things than the blood of Abel. No outward waſhings and external purifications, ſince none of them can purify the heart; but the blood of Chriſt cleanſes and purifies from all ſins. But finally, the goſpel is a law of liberty in it's effects; it procures liberty where it is obeyed, and brings the ſinner out of bondage and ſlavery into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God. They that would ſuggeſt that religion is nothing elſe but a device of ſtateſmen and politicians, to keep the world in awe, themſelves acknowledge by this confeſſion that it is admirably calculated to promote men's happineſs and welfare, preſcribing the moſt excellent rules for magiſtrates and ſubjects, huſbands and wives, parents and children, maſters and ſervants. The eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity is highly conducive to the public welfare, as well as to the peace and happineſs of every individual: happy would it be,

were it's rules attended to. The juſtice and equity which it preſcribes would prevent all oppreſſion; the meek and forgiving nature of the goſpel of Chriſt would reſtrain all the bitterneſs of anger, ſtrife, rage, and animoſity; all clamour, wrath, and evil-ſpeaking, would ceaſe; the ſelf-denying precepts which it enjoins, would prevent all intemperance, gluttony, pride, ambition, or covetouſneſs. It's benevolent and philanthropic tendency would, if men really were influenced by it, put a ſtop to all thoſe diviſions, ſchiſms, and religious contentions, which have, and ſtill are now convulſing the churches of Chriſt, and ſetting chriſtian profeſſors at variance with each other. The induſtry which it exacts of all it's profeſſors would occaſion all idleneſs and extravagant diſſipation to ceaſe. In fine, it would free men from every dangerous and headſtrong paſſion, eradicate every noxious weed from the mind, and make them meet for the inheritance of the ſaints in light. If ſuch is the caſe, how careful and circumſpect ſhould we be, my chriſtian brethren, in guiding and regulating our paths by the rules of this perfect law of liberty; for though we can never

never expect to gain admiſſion to heaven by the deeds of the law; (for if we break even one point, we are guilty of all; and who is there that has not broke the laws of God times and ways without number?) yet we ſhall never participate of the bleſſings purchaſed by Chriſt, unleſs we continually look into this perfect law of liberty, and continue therein, not being forgetful hearers, but doers of the word; for ſuch is the folly and weakneſs of the human heart, that unleſs we meditate continually on the law of God, we ſhall for ever be deviating from the paths of rectitude. What a beautiful ſimile does St. James uſe to illuſtrate this idea! he compares a careleſs and negligent profeſſor to a man beholding his natural face in a glaſs, who goes away and inſtantly forgets what manner of perſon he was; and thus the man who neglects to look into the perfect law of liberty, becomes careleſs and negligent in his conduct, he eaſily falls a prey to the ſnares and temptations that ſurround him, and becomes a ſtone of ſtumbling and a rock of offence, occaſions the goſpel to be evil ſpoken of through his conduct. Let us therefore pray to

God,

God, that we may have a heart ſound in his ſtatutes, and that by his divine grace operating within us, we may be drawn from a death of ſin to a life of righteouſneſs, quickened and made alive, and perfected unto every good work. Let therefore our moſt rapturous praiſe ariſe to the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that we live under ſuch a glorious diſpenſation as the goſpel is. It is a perfect law of liberty; therefore, as we have received much, much will be required of us. The heathens knew not God, and were ſtrangers to the goſpel of his Son. We enjoy great privileges indeed, what were denied to the ſaints under the former diſpenſation. Abraham beheld the day when this perfect law of liberty was to be proclaimed, and was glad; the dying Jacob ſpake of it with rapture; unto Chriſt, our law-giver, did Moſes and the prophets bear witneſs. Living then under ſuch a diſpenſation of light and liberty, let us take heed unto our ways, that our improvements be adequate to our advantages: for finally, let us remember that by this perfect law of liberty we ſhall be judged; and of what puniſhment ſhall not we be

accounted

accounted worthy, if we have rejected this law, deſpiſed and contemned it! If they eſcaped not who refuſed Moſes that ſpake on earth, much more ſhall not we eſcape if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven. Let us therefore ſerve God acceptably with fear and reverence, for to all impenitent and obſtinate ſinners, our God is a conſuming fire. Amen.

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F I N I S.

James 1 ch. v- 23, 24, 25-

The Apostle St. Jas. compares ... to ... glass. Let readers Apostles beautiful allusion, - we shall see in what are pointed out. — In first place. Man ... admire & love, & converse with ... handsome ... They ... glass & there were, represent those ... & notions of ... wealth. Instead of ... seeing Him, or humbling Him at deficiencies, & ... it is said ... passage, & find ... conceits. such ... of the Pharisees old ... enough to ... By ... strict ... most punctilious makes ... Jack ... mighty ... & favor. Others ... They ... look out & ... examine, ... Him ...

These are the men of learning, & the skill & skilled criticism, - saint & spiritual & curious enquiries. They are the most acute lawyers! are the boundary disputers, & the determined system, & the decrees of value & the They are the controversy, & are very learned & the debate, - & applauses & nice interpretations, - happy accommodations of different texts - & in a word the whole are the task & learned labors. Like Necromancers of old, & raise spirits & by credit of saying, tho' with the help & mischief one

But besides those & men - vanity & sort of men, & are characterized & apostles comparison & are called - They straightway forget what & are. Now these are far most numerous sort of xtns. They & the & as intended & cure. The pharisees & W. mystery & in & higher rr. They first & the soul above all states & bad

Besides these ill disposed - carnal men & are the apostles comparison suppose & are merely adjust & empty merely & discover the. These are & the & five of views.

The first & widely the & among. If & in the - comp, & the whole - actions & words & the course of many & daily stirs & thus & fault & by & point out & kind monitor. Friendship & delicate. But be & the & as & & be so & his eyes, & his fault laid bare be

The 2d point be - view, or amendment & fault & the virtues. Many, & of & are - of fantastically, & just - merely ornaments & are plain single - & coming - render & fault & of & & the virtues & xn - This & man & apostles comparison & mutation - This & man & the & & be